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Top Arms Negotiator's Job Said to Be in Jeopardy

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WASHINGTON, March 18 — Senior Administration officials said today that they thought Edward L. Rowny would not be able to carry on as chief strategic arms negotiator because of disputes over a private memorandum attributed to him that criticizes his colleagues in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

"This has left the negotiating team in a pretty untenable situation," one high official said. "It's going to be difficult for them to conduct those negotiations together." His comments were echoed by other officials.

Republican Senators were reported to have warned the White House that the furor on Capitol Hill over Mr. Rowny's memorandum had landed him "in political trouble" that might ultimately force his resignation and block the President's effort to install Kenneth L. Adelman as director of the arms control agency. "Rowny could take Adelman down with him," a Senate Republican leadership source said.

Talking about the vote on Mr. Adelman, Senator Ted Stevens, the majority whip, told reporters today: "It's unfor-

tunate that he's been held to answer for a memo he didn't prepare. That memo has clouded the issue. It will be a very close vote. We may have to go a very long time until we get to a vote."

'I'm Not Happy'

Asked whether Mr. Rowny should be dismissed, the Alaska Republican looked uncomfortable. "I'm not happy with the memo," he replied. "I'm not happy with the way it's been handled."

Senate Republicans quoted White House officials as trying at all costs to avoid having Mr. Rowny called to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee to explain the unclassified memorandum, which criticized 18 Government officials, identified one as a Central Intelligence Agency officer and urged that two Democrats be barred from continuing to serve as Congressional observers at the arms talks in Geneva.

On Thursday, one of the two, Senator Gary Hart, a Colorado Democrat who is seeking the Democratic Presidential nomination, called for the resignation of Mr. Rowny, a career Army officer who is now in his first diplomatic post.

While Secretary of State George P. Shultz voiced "full confidence in Ambassador Rowny" today through his spokesman, John Hughes, other State Department and arms control agency officials said privately that there had been high-level dissatisfaction with Mr. Rowny's handling of the strategic arms negotiations even before the present case.

One Administration official said there had been some discussion several months ago at top levels of the Administration about replacing Mr. Rowny, but apparently no recommendation was ever taken to President Reagan.

White House spokesmen have avoided public comment in hopes of dampening the political dispute, but privately White House officials have expressed both anger and embarrassment over the memo and Mr. Rowny's efforts to disavow it.

Mr. Rowny said it was "informal talking points prepared" by his staff and did not represent his views. But officials who have read it said it carried Mr. Adelman's covering note to another official saying, evidently speaking of Mr. Rowny, "These are Ed's real views."

Before this dispute, senior Reagan

Administration officials were said to have been unhappy about Mr. Rowny's management of the negotiating team and the quality of his reports, which were said to be tardy and meager in information and to expose disagreements in the negotiating team.

Some officials said there was a dramatic difference in the operational competence and the quality of diplomatic reporting of Mr. Rowny and Paul H. Nitze, who heads the parallel but separate talks on intermediate-range nuclear forces.

"Nitze's cables come back on time and they're informative and concise," one official said. "His entire operation is professional." He said Mr. Rowny's cables were late and were followed by many corrections.

Another concern reportedly discussed by senior State Department and Pentagon officials was Mr. Rowny's personal relationships with other members of the negotiating team.

In his memorandum to Mr. Adelman, he criticized three of his closest associates as wanting "progress at any cost" and said a fourth was "OTL" or "out to lunch," according to those who have read the memorandum. Only one of the five top officials on the negotiating team was praised as "solid."

Some Administration officials, reportedly including Eugene V. Rostow, the former chief of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, advocated replacing Mr. Rowny and putting Mr. Nitze in charge of both those talks and the strategic arms talks.

One participant in these high-level discussions said that although there had been talk for some time of replacing Mr. Rowny, the Administration had hesitated because of the potential political repercussions in the arms negotiating team. This person said, "We thought we could get through the first couple of rounds of talks and any shift could be done naturally in a way that would not hurt Rowny or the President."